

Painting the Sky

by marv

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it. All my stories are amateur works. As always comments are

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something else to do with your free time :-)

Painting the Sky

As I stand on the beach I slowly surrender
To the child in me who can't say goodbye.
_The rockets in the air and the people everywhere____
Put away their differences for a while.
Oh, I am still a child, when it comes to something wild.
That was the night I painted the sky.

Jimmy Buffett

The vid-phone on Kristin Westphalen's desk beeped indicating an incoming call. She automatically reached over and connected the call and only then turned to look at her caller.

"Oh, my¹/₄.you look like you're having just a stellar day," Kristin said sarcastically to the image of Nathan Bridger that appeared on her screen. On almost anyone the look he had on his face could be considered to be a 'sourpuss'. He looked depressed, dejected and downtrodden.

"I am having a totally, completely and undeniably crappy day," Nathan said with a frown.

"Would having lunch together make things better?"

Nathan almost looked like he deflated some. "Having lunch together would make things a whole _lot_ better¹/₄.but I'm scheduled to have lunch with Bill and this McGath guy." He sighed and then frowned at the screen again. "Kris, I've been thinking¹/₄.is there any reason you can think of why we shouldn't go away to the island for the weekend?"

Kristin turned more towards the screen. Now he had her attention. "You know, I hadn't thought about it¹/₄.but no, I don't see any reason why not. With the Independence Day holiday in there we could make it a nice long weekend."

"Yeah, that's what I was thinking¹/₄.and I really need a nice long weekend about now." A small smile came back to his face. "Alright if I see if Lucas wants to come with?"

"Absolutely," she smiled.

Two days later found them meeting up with Juan in the marina in Cozumel and sailing across to spend a few peaceful, simple days on the island. Nathan had been almost hopeless and unbearable to live with during the days prior to leaving. His normal condition was that he exhibited a disgusting amount of energy but during the last couple of days he had been almost insufferable. Just being around him was enough to drive a sane person crazy. He'd been on the vid-phone with Juan every evening and he packed and repacked his bag at least three times.

He was up to something. Kristin could see all the signs. The hurried conversations with Juan that stopped as soon as she came in the room. The furtive messages back and forth on the computer. The sudden loss of attention when he'd just start looking out to the horizon and stop talking for no reason at all. and he was getting more and more anxious as they got closer to their holiday. Even Lucas seemed calm compared to Nathan by the time that they finally boarded the plane. Normally on the flight there Nathan slept a good bit of the way but this time Kristin had him sit in the window seat since she knew that he was going to need something to look at to calm him down. even if all he could look at was the water the airplane was passing over. If it had been possible to pace in the plane "Nathan would have done so.

Juan was ready for them at the marina and soon they were under sail and on their way to the island. Juan even let Lucas man the wheel for a while. Nathan and Lucas had been working on improving Lucas' sailing skills and from what Kristin could see they'd made some great strides. In one way it seemed like only a moment and at the same time it seemed like forever before they were gently steering the sailboat up to the dock at Bridger's Island. Only a moment since the late afternoon sail had been a wonderful one. The sky was clear and there was just enough of a fresh breeze to allow them the luxury of using the sails alone and forgoing the motor. and the trip had seemed to take forever because Nathan couldn't stay still. Kristin finally had to threaten to throw him overboard and let him swim along side the boat to get him to sit down. and even then he fidgeted constantly.

When they arrived Lucas and Nathan jumped off the boat onto the dock to secure the boat and so that Juan could hand down their bags. Then, as normal, Juan handed down a large cooler of food. and then another cooler and then yet another.

Kristin stood on the dock shaking her head. "Do I want to know what all the food is for?"

Nathan was in the process of hefting one cooler onto his shoulder and he swung around to look at her. "Oh. we're having a few people over for the Fourth."

"And when were you planning on telling me this?"

"Ummm. I guess I forgot."

Kristin could only grin at his obvious excitement about the gathering. a cookout she imagined since that was what Nathan specialized in when he had a bunch of people to visit. She picked up hers and Nathan's bags and fell into step beside him. "Should I ask how many people?"

"Well, Juan and his angel, of course. and then Brandy and Rick and Dave and Aki." He looked over at where Lucas was walking with another of the coolers. "Oh and Dave and Aki are bringing DJ with them."

Lucas looked over at him with a surprised smile on his face. "You're kidding. you mean that I'll actually have someone my own age to run around with this weekend? cool." DJ was only about six months younger than Lucas and both boys had taken an instant liking to each

other when they had met earlier this year. Nathan knew that the boys would probably spend the majority of the day exploring the island since that was one of their favorite pastimes.

They had finally gotten settled in and all the food was stashed away. Kristin was still a little suspicious of the hurried conversation that Nathan had with Juan as he was leaving for his island. It wasn't so much the fact that they had the conversation as the furtive glances back in her direction that both of them hazarded throughout the talk. Nighttime had settled in and all three of them were enjoying the gentle breeze as it played across the porch. Lucas had picked out one of the comfortable beach chairs and Kristin and Nathan were snuggled together in the canvas love seat at the end of the porch. The calmness that had seemed to descend upon all three of them after they had eaten their dinner was almost surreal. They just sat quietly as Nathan and Kristin held onto each other and Lucas appeared to be lost in his thoughts. Finally, Kristin broke the silence.

"So when's everyone coming over tomorrow?"

Nathan sighed and stretched a little. "Oh, they'll be here a little after noon or so. Lucas, you and I need to do some setting up in the morning."

"No problem, Cap."

Silence fell over the three of them again until Kristin looked across at Nathan's nodding head. He'd probably expended all his energy with his fidgeting earlier. She put her forehead against his and ruffled his hair with one hand. "Hey, buddy. Looks like you need to get some sack time before you crash on me."

Nathan roused himself a little and scratched his head before getting up out of the chair. "I think you're right. You coming with me?" Kristin nodded and stood. Lucas stood up also and headed for the door.

"Night time for me too. I'll see you two in the morning."

The couple turned into their bedroom as they wished their goodnights to Lucas. Nathan, with one arm around Kristin's waist, reached over and flipped on the light switch as they went through the door. As always the first sight of their bed caused a smile to cross Nathan's lips and he shook his head.

"I still don't know how he found that bed." Juan had found the bed for them. Well, at the time he didn't know it was for them but it was probably the best bed either one of them had ever seen. A king-sized brass four poster canopy bed that was a wonder to look at and even better to sleep in.

Kristin turned in his arms so that she was facing him. "My only question is do you plan on just sleeping in that bed this weekend or are we going to have a little fun?"

The smile on his face got bigger. "Kris, when's the last time we didn't have fun when we were down here?"

"The last time. During that storm that you insisted wasn't going to hit the island."

"Hey, I never claimed to be a meteorologist." He pulled her closer and all of a sudden he wasn't nearly as tired as he had been earlier. His hands slowly roamed her back from her shoulders down until they spanned the indentation at the small of her back.

Kristin started to snuggle up to him and then stopped, bringing one of her hands up and putting a finger on his lips. "Hold that thought for just one moment." She disentangled herself from his arms and went back to the door where she carefully locked the door and then returned to stand in front of Nathan. "Now...did you have something in mind for this evening?"

"Just maybe," said Nathan as his arms once again slipped around her waist to pull her close to him and she closed her eyes contentedly as his lips gently anointed her forehead with little kisses. Nathan's hands slid down to her hips and then back up again to slide beneath her shirt. The touch of her smooth skin against his hands was intoxicating and he pulled her closer and brought his lips down to meet hers. What started as gentle, pecking kisses soon escalated as his tongue pressed along her willing lips which opened to deepen the kiss into a passionate, heady kiss that left both of them gasping for air.

Kristin leaned her forehead against his chin as she attempted to control her breathing.

"I've got a question," Nathan breathed into her hair.

"What," she gasped.

"Why the hell do we still have all our clothes on?"

Her hands immediately came up to the buttons on his shirt. "I can fix that," she said and it almost became a race to see which one could remove the other's clothes fastest. Nathan knelt as he slid the last piece of clothing, Kristin's panties, down off her feet. That task finished he looked up at her from his place on the floor with a sly grin on his face.

"What?" Kristin asked hesitantly.

Nathan brought both of his arms around to grasp Kristin behind her knees and put his shoulder into her waist.

"Nathan don't," Kristin said with a giggle in her voice.

"Don't what?" he said as he stood picking Kristin up so that she was draped across his shoulder and carried her over to the bed.

"Nathan, put me down," she was still giggling.

"Put you down?" he asked innocently. With one hand Nathan opened the mosquito net that covered the bed and then he unceremoniously dumped Kristin on the bed.

"Nathan!" she said in an affronted voice.

He leaned over the bed. "But you said to put you down," he said reasonably.

She didn't buy his innocent act at all but instead reached up and wove her fingers through his hair as she pulled his head down to once more feel the touch of his lips on hers. The mosquito netting closed without a sound as he joined her on the bed.

Kristin awoke gradually the next morning aware of the different smell and feel of being on the island. Her lips pursed in a little frown as she lazily reached over to where Nathan should be and was only met with empty sheets and air. For a moment she lay back with her eyes closed soaking up the calm, the peace, the quiet of the island. That was until the calm and peace and quiet were broken by a, not loud, but heartfelt curse from the kitchen. Kristin slid out of the bed and reaching for her robe, headed to the bathroom. That task being completed she went to stand in the door of the kitchen, leaning back against the frame with her arms folded over her chest. Nathan had his back to her and was busily cutting up fruit for a fresh fruit salad. The bandaid wrapper on the countertop and a bloody paper towel were witness to what had caused the earlier cursing.

Nathan turned with a hollowed out watermelon which had been cleverly made into a basket in his hands. The watermelon was full of several different types of fruit. Apparently Nathan had not heard her come in the kitchen and he looked up surprised.

"Oh! good morning, sleepy head."

"That looks lovely! but are you alright?"

He stood from placing the fruit on ice in one of the large coolers. "Huh?..." Then he held up the index finger of his left hand which now sported a neon green bandaid around the end of it. "Yeah! I just got a little careless with the knife." He walked over to her and, sliding one hand inside her robe, engaged in a heady kiss.

A kiss which was interrupted as Lucas came into the kitchen clearing his throat. Bridger gingerly slid his hand from beneath the folds of Kristin's robe. Kristin lowered her head for a moment to lean it against Nathan's cheek before sliding out from between him and the wall.

"Well, what are you doing up so early?" Kristin asked Lucas.

With a box of cereal in one hand and a bowl in the other Lucas fixed Bridger's back with a glare. "Someone threw a pillow at me to wake me up."

Nathan turned with a smile and a shake of his head. "If you think I was going to shake your shoulder again after what you did to me! forget it fellow."

"You could have let me sleep," Lucas said without much good grace.

Bridger only grinned over at him. "I could have! but I need your help setting up."

Lucas stared at his cereal as he poured milk over it. Then he cocked

one eye up at Nathan. "What do we have to do?"

"We need to put up the hammock, get the grill ready and then we've got a project to work on."

"What sort of project?" Lucas asked suspiciously.

Nathan hazarded a quick glance at Kristin who was fortunately looking the other direction. "Just a project. Trust me," he said reassuringly.

Kristin turned from the refrigerator. "What do I need to do while you boys are setting things up outside?"

Nathan glanced quickly around the kitchen. "Umm. Not much really. I've got the fruit done, the shish kebob is ready, the beer, wine and pop are on ice. I don't know, you could make a regular salad if you'd like one."

"Alright," Kristin trailed her hand across Nathan's shoulders as she left the kitchen. "I'm going to take a shower first and then I'll get to it."

Kristin came out of the bedroom toweling her hair dry. She'd dressed in a white and red cotton shirt and cut-off blue jean shorts. She smiled as she looked out to where Nathan and Lucas were trying to put up the hammock. Their discussion appeared to be rather animated. Sometimes the two of them could make tying your shoes complicated.

"Cap, why don't you just tie the rope a little tighter than you did last time if you don't want the hammock so close to the sand?"

Nathan's voice was that of a parent explaining something to a dense child. "Because if I tie it any tighter he spanner bars at the end will be too close to the tree and it won't swing."

"Well, that would keep the two of you from falling out." That earned Lucas a glare from Nathan.

"Just move the eyebolt that holds it up, Mr. Smart Guy."

Lucas shrugged his shoulders and moved the eyebolt on the tree about six inches higher than it had been before. Bridger did the same on his side and then they stretched the hammock out between the trees.

"You're going to need to tie it looser than it was before."

Lucas looked over at him in frustration. "We move the eyebolts up to get it off the ground and then you still want to tie it looser than it was so it'll be close to the ground?"

"I don't want it the same height as it was last time we were here. That was too low, but I still need it at the right height to be able to put my leg out to swing it."

Lucas just turned to his task grumbling. "If ya didn't keep putting two people into a one person hammock you wouldn't have this problem," he mumbled under his breath.

Bridger finished his side and then backed up to inspect the way the hammock was hanging. Nodding his head in satisfaction he returned to stand next to Lucas. "Looks good." He patted the boy on the shoulder and grinned. "And did I ever tell you that I have excellent hearing?"

Lucas just grinned back and then followed Bridger to the next chore.

Kristin looked out of the house and saw that they had moved over to getting the grill ready. The beach and the area next to the dock made for an excellent place to put the beach chairs down there so that everyone could enjoy the cool breeze and the sunshine if they wanted or put their chairs into the shade provided by the palm trees if that was their preference. A short time later as she was chopping carrots for the salad she looked out again and frowned as she saw that the two of them were now carrying what looked to be a large footlocker that they had taken from the boathouse and were heading down the beach. After a short time her view of them was blocked by the same boathouse and she just made a mental note to herself to remember to ask them about it later.

"Where did you get these?" Lucas asked with total amazement written all over his face.

"You don't want to know, kid. Just suffice it to say that I've got my contacts."

Lucas fingered the gaily colored tubes and balls. "These have got to be illegal in every country in the world now."

Nathan paused in his preparations. "Yeah. Pretty much. You really want to know what you're doing before you mess with this stuff."

Lucas went to sit down in the sand facing Bridger. "And you know what you're doing, huh?"

"Absolutely, Lucas," his hands deftly twisted and shaped a cord. "I've been doing this for more years than you've been alive."

"You gonna teach me?" Lucas asked hopefully.

Bridger smiled as he reached into the footlocker for another item. "Sure, if you want to learn."

The next two hours were spent working on the items from the footlocker and then setting them up in order and packing sand around them to prepare for the festivities.

Kristin looked out a couple hours later to see Nathan and Lucas apparently finished with their work having a rousing game of 'catch

and dunk' in the water. She wiped her hands on a towel and walked out to the beach.

"Do you two feel like any lunch? I'm not sure on when you were planning on eating." This last was directed to Bridger.

Nathan and Lucas came out of the water and each grabbed a towel from the box on the dock. Their good humor continued all the way up to the house as they managed to get each other involved in a towel snapping contest. Just in time Kristin saw Nathan grin her direction and she stopped that thought cold.

"You try it once, buddy, and you're sleeping in the hammock¹.alone¹.for the rest of the trip." Nathan had the gall to flash an innocent look at her.

As they all finished what Nathan termed their rather 'traditional American lunch' of peanut butter sandwiches and potato chips Kristin gave them another job to do.

"Don't forget that you need to move some of the chairs from here down onto the beach so everyone has a place to sit."

"Got it," said Nathan and as he and Lucas got up Lucas grabbed all the empty plates to take them into the kitchen. Kristin watched as Nathan folded up four chairs and headed off the porch.

Lucas reached over and took Kristin's plate from her. "Oh, thank you," she said absently still watching Nathan and then her attention seemed to refocus on Lucas. "By the way, what was it you two were doing out there with that chest?"

Lucas turned quickly towards the house and answered in a nondescript voice. "Oh, we were just setting things up," and he headed into the house followed by Kristin's questioning gaze.

Shortly after noon Juan's boat was seen on the horizon and they went down to meet him at the dock. Nathan caught the bow line and Lucas the stern line which they both secured to the pilings and Juan, the tall, handsome man from an island about 40 minutes away stepped onto the dock and then lent his hand to a beautiful woman several years younger than him as she stepped from the boat to the dock. Juan and his angel, Angelina, made a rather striking pair. Both were tall but Angelina was thin to Juan's bulk. It wasn't really stockiness¹it was more just that Juan was massive. He was a builder by trade and his arms showed evidence of years of swinging a heavy hammer, whereas Angelina was thin, almost delicate. Sometimes Nathan thought that when he saw him hug her that he might break her in two but their embraces always had been tender¹.there was no way that the big teddy bear, Juan, would ever harm his angel.

While they were exchanging pleasantries and getting everyone's drinks set up, the boat owned by Rick was seen coming around the point of the small lagoon. Rick and Brandy shared a larger island with Dave and Aki and their son, DJ so all had arrived in the same boat. It wasn't long afterwards that the two boys brought out the football and started tossing it around the beach. Of course, this was something the men couldn't ignore and pretty soon all six of the males on the

island were involved in a touch football game that bordered on full-contact. The women watched them for a while shouting out encouragement and more than an occasional rude comment about their football ability, or lack of it.

Finally the guys had enough, "Alright, if you ladies know so much about football.Â½why don't you come out here and join us?"

The four women looked at each other and shrugged and then placing their drinks on the dock and much to the surprise of the men, they went to join the football game. The guys may have known more about playing football but after a short while they were all reflecting that the women could certainly move quicker than any of them couldÂ½and sometimes they were just as nasty.

Nathan jumped for a throw that was about three feet over his head only to be pulled down into the sand by Kristin. Nathan landed on his back with a grunt and Kristin fell on top of him, causing him to grunt again. "Hey, I thought this was touch football," Nathan said indignantly.

"It isÂ½I just touched you," Kristin said as she reached over and planted a kiss on his nose before rolling off of him and helping him up.

Nathan frowned at her. "Somehow, I don't think you've quite caught the gist of this," he mumbled under his breath as he stood across from her waiting for the next snap of the ball.

Just as the ball was snapped Kristin reached forward and tickled Nathan in a particularly sensitive spot just to the right of his belly button. Nathan, not expecting this attack, went down to his knees and completely missed the pass that was thrown his wayÂ½for that matter as the pass sailed over his head Angelina reached up and plucked it out of the air and then ran for a touchdown.

Nathan sat dejectedly in the sand. "I give upÂ½ these ladies don't play fair."

A smiling Rick squatted on the sand next to him and put his hand on Nathan's shoulder. "Just how old are you Nathan?" Nathan frowned up at the younger man. "They're women, Nathan, they're not supposed to play fair."

Kristin came up behind Nathan and put both of her arms around his now sweaty and sandy shoulders. "I think it's about time he got the grill going anyways." She placed a quick kiss on his ear for good measure and let him up.

As expected, while the food was being prepared Lucas and DJ disappeared to explore the island some more with instructions to be back in a half of an hour. The boys arrived back just in time with their hands held behind their backs and grins on their faces.

"Oh, noÂ½what are you two up to?" asked Aki.

DJ went over to squat next to the chair that his mother was sitting in and put his best 'good boy' face on. "Why my dearest mother,

whatever would make you think that I'm up to anything?" he said factiously.

His mother smiled and shook her head slowly. "Probably the fact that I know you too well."

Lucas also had gone over to squat next to Kristin's chair. His innocent face was also in evidence as he looked up to the people in the crowd. "Do you notice how they always think we're up to something?"

Bridger grinned back at the boys. "That's because you usually are."

"Not this time—we just found something nice and we figured we share it." DJ brought a beautiful flower around from behind his back as Lucas did the same. The flower had the shape of a petunia but it was larger and more sturdy. The one DJ had was purple with white edging and the one Lucas had found was pink with yellow edges. Each boy also had another flower of a different color for each of the other women.

"You've got a whole huge stand of these up on the hill just below the bunker, Cap," Lucas said.

"Yeah, I've seen them before but I hadn't for several years. Maybe the trees we lost from the storms is letting a bit more light get to the forest bottom up there."

"They're lovely, thank you both," Kristin said as Lucas even stood still long enough to accept a kiss on the cheek.

Dinner had been finished and the sun had just set over the top of the hill as all ten of the people on the island sat in their chairs enjoying small talk and each other's company.

"Nathan, Kristin, thanks—this has been a great day," said Dave as he twirled his iced tea in one hand and ran the other over his wife's arm.

"Oh, and it's not over yet," said Nathan with a smile. He reached over and brushed back a stray hair from Kristin's face as he looked over at Lucas. "You ready?"

"Yup," said the boy standing and walking up the beach with Nathan.

Brandy saw the perplexed look on Kristin's face. "They didn't tell you what they're going to do, did they?"

"No—should I be afraid?" Kristin asked half-seriously.

"Nah, not afraid—just wait," said Rick.

"Every island should have at least one crazy American—and our crazy American is Nathan," that comment was from Juan.

Kristin could still see a little of Nathan and Lucas down the beach.

It looked like they were pulling on gloves and putting hoods on for some obscure reason. Then Kristin saw the flare of a small flame¼.the type from a long-neck butane lighter like you'd use to light a fireplace. Kristin saw Nathan kneel near a mound of sand and saw the lighter flare. Then she heard a 'fwoomp' and a small trail of sparks climbed to the sky before a rocket exploded in a beautiful waterfall of colors. For almost a half of an hour Lucas and Nathan decorated the sky with brightly sparkling rockets and mortars and a couple of impressive ground displays before the watchers heard their shout down the beach.

"Get ready¼.here comes the finale!!"

They could see the two of them scurrying back and forth on the beach in a dance that they had obviously planned ahead of time as they sent up burst after burst into the air to fill the sky with beautifully colored sparkles and bangs. There were so many rockets and mortars in their finale that when it finally ended, to the loud applause of their audience, the beach where they had been standing was covered in a cloud of smoke. Nathan and Lucas appeared from inside the cloud and with a flourish removed their fire-protective gloves and hoods. The audience stood and cheered as their pyromaniacs took their bows.

The last boat had left the dock and Nathan and Kristin were picking up glasses to bring them back up to the house. Lucas had made sure the grill was all out and joined them walking back up the wood path that led to the house.

"Nathan, I get this feeling that today was something of a tradition," Kristin said softly.

"Yeah," said Nathan in a voice tinged with a little sadness. "We used to spend the different holidays celebrating on each other's islands¼.I guess it's been a while." Kristin gave a little squeeze with the arm that was wrapped around his waist.

"Captain, can I ask you something?" Lucas asked hesitantly.

"Sure, go ahead."

"Did you used to do the fireworks thing with Robert?"

Nathan's voice was soft and calm when he responded. "Yeah¼but I have to admit that you do a better job¼.." There was a hint of humor in his voice. "Every year at some time or another during the display, Robert would almost get himself killed¼.you at least followed my directions and stayed safe the whole time."

"And I for one can't tell you two how much I appreciate you two not managing to blow yourselves up this holiday," Kristin said sincerely. Lucas smiled and to Kristin's surprise put his arm around her from the other side and the three of them walked together to the porch.

Lucas yawned as they reached the steps. "Everything's pretty much cleaned up. You guys don't mind if I go to bed, do you? Someone got me up really early this morning."

"Oh, for pete's sake" mumbled Bridger, "but no, we don't mind. Good night, Lucas"

"Good night, Lucas," said Kristin as the boy removed his hand from her waist a little shyly.

He turned to the two of them. "Good night, Doc," he said and hesitated a moment before, to Nathan's total surprise, giving Nathan a hug. "Good night, sir" and thanks "it was terrific." A tone of complete awe was still evident in the boy's voice. Lucas turned and went into the house leaving two amazed adults outside.

Kristin slid her other arm around Nathan's waist and gave him a hug. "I think you were a hit."

Nathan still watched after Lucas for a moment before turning back to Kristin. He tried to say something but the words wouldn't work their way through the lump in his throat and he finally settled for a quiet, "Yeah," and leaned his forehead on Kristin's.

Kristin brought one of her hands up to caress the side of his face and he slightly turned his face into the hand. "Hey, I've got an idea," she said softly.

"Hmm?"

"Why don't you and I go in the bedroom and see what kind of fireworks we can make on our own?"

The end.

End
file.